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ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

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ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

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June 17, 1975	June 17, 1975
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INTERVIEWEE: Mrs. Arline Merkel

INTERVIEWER: Steve Francis

FRANCIS: This is an interview with Mrs. Arline Merkel for the Joliet Junior College Oral History Project by Steve Francis at her home on July 17, 1975 at 1:15 p.m.

FRANCIS: Mrs. Merkel, let's start with your move to Wilmington. How did it come about?

MERKEL: Well, when I lived in Joliet, I used to ride down with our family doctor sometimes when he came down on a consultation and I was impressed with Wilmington. I thought it was such a nice little town; and I always thought that if I were a doctor starting out, I think I would pick out a small town like Wilmington. I was married when I was a nurse in World War I, and my husband was from Maryland and he wanted to set up a practice out here. He liked central Illinois or northern Illinois; and so he said, "Well, how about Wilmington?" He didn't take anybody's practice. He came in and hung out a shingle, and it was a little rough at first. We took in $7 the first month and $5 the second. So it was very slow. We moved in across the street from here, but there was a doctor living in this house and trying to practice. But the doctor here had never worked in anything but a hospital, and he became discouraged very quickly and decided that a country practice was not for him and he moved away. So then there was just Dr. Merkel and one other doctor in town. This was Dr. Carlin, Dr. Geroge Carlin's father. So my husband and Dr. Carlin were competitors and very good friends.

FRANCIS: What year did you move to Wilmington?

MERKEL: Nineteen nineteen, in the fall. November of 1919.

FRANCIS: Where was the office located?

MERKEL: We moved when the other man left. This house was built in 1865 by a doctor. The house was exactly as it is arranged today. The office was on the right-hand side. There's a main hall when you come in the front door, and the office is exactly to the right -- a door just to the right. There was an office, waiting room, and drug room -- a separate little compartment -- and, of course, a separate outside door. The drug room opened into the family kitchen. Of course, now, the office has been converted into an apartment.

FRANCIS: Could you describe some of the equipment that he had in his office?

MERKEL: Well, he didn't have very much. We took over just exactly as it was. The doctor had rented it furnished, and we took it over just exactly as it was. So we got along. He had a blood pressure outfit and a stethoscope and not too much else. There were splints and some bandages and a few dressings. And that's how we started out. There were some drugs in the drug cabinet there, but they were not drugs that Dr. Merkel had been taught to use, and most of them went down the drain. /Laughter/

FRANCIS: Did Dr. Merkel make any house calls?

MERKEL: Yes, he did. He made a great many house calls. That was before the day when doctors did not make house calls. He made house calls all morning. Then from the time he came out of his office -- oh, about 4:30 -- until supper time he made house calls. He saw patients in the office only during the office hours in the afternoon.

FRANCIS: He put in a long day then?

MERKEL: Yes, he did. It was a very long day, and then he had some evening office hours -- half-past seven til nine.

FRANCIS: How many babies did he deliver? Can you just make an estimate?

MERKEL: Oh, at least three to five hundred.

FRANCIS: Are there any babies of his still around here?

MERKEL: I expect there are. I know the Jones children, Mrs. Maude Jones' children. Of course, there are many others, but I haven't given it much thought. I was thinking about the Joneses because I was with them the other day; and she said,"Oh, I remember Dr. Merkel." I said, "Yes, you should. He brought you." /Laughter/ Steve, he brought your uncle Larry. (Note: L.A. Bittermann, President, First National Bank)

FRANCIS: How much would it cost to deliver a baby?

MERKEL: Why, he was supposed to get $25 for a delivery; but so very, very many times the people were not able to pay that, and he would take half of that for a delivery.

FRANCIS: How hard was it to collect?

MERKEL: Very, very hard. He had a lot of money on his books when he died -- even that much later, you know. It was a farmer situation here -- retired farmers -- and they had gotten in the habit while they were on the farm of paying their bills in the fall when they sold their crops, you know. And so they still had that habit. They wanted to wait until fall to pay their bills. But, of course, we had bills to pay in between, and that

was a little bit hard. The doctor kept sending out statements, and he explained to the patients in the office that that was not a dun,* but that it was a legitimate bill like you'd get from a store if you bought a hat or a suit of clothes. So they didn't seem to be hurt about it at all, and they finally got in the habit of making some little small payments, which was a very great help. They couldn't meet maybe a $20 bill, but they'd come in and pay a couple of dollars when they had a payday; and then they'd get it down until they finally had it wiped out and were tickled to death about it. Some people had a superstition that if they owed the doctor money they wouldn't need him soon. *(Note: A dun was a second notice on a bill due, and was considered either an insult or a disgrace. It was understood that a man would pay his bills as promptly as he could, and he resented reminders of debt. Obviously, this attitude and the connotation of the word dun has changed.)

FRANCIS: For instance, when the depression hit, was it harder to collect bills?

MERKEL: Yes; very, very hard. Very hard. We had to watch our step very closely because collections were hard enough that it cut our income materially.

FRANCIS: What hospitals would Dr. Merkel use?

MERKEL: Both St. Joseph's and Silver Cross. He had many Catholic patients and they preferred to go to St. Joseph's, and many people wanted to go to Silver Cross. Wherever they wanted to go, he took care of them either place. He had worked at St. Joseph's in Baltimore, which was under the same supervision as the St. Joseph's in Joliet. So the Sisters liked him

very much, you know, because he talked to them about where he worked in Baltimore and they knew all about that hospital.

FRANCIS: Was transportation a problem, getting patients up to the hospital?

MERKEL: Yes, it was. Doctor took them many times himself. They couldn't afford an ambulance. I don't remember that when we first came there was an ambulance. You had to get one from Joliet to come down, which was a very great expense. Later there was an ambulance. But many times, as a patient just had to stretch out in the back seat, he'd take them in himself. Just put them in the car and take them in because maybe they didn't have any car. And they were very sick; lots of times it was imminent surgery, like an acute appendix. They'd just ask him, "Doctor, can you take me in? I don't have any way to get in."

FRANCIS: Was Dr. Merkel a surgeon?

MERKEL: He assisted with surgery, but he didn't do surgery. Whenever he referred a case to Dr. Shreffler or Dr. Wagner or any other surgeons, he would assist in the surgery. And patients always made sure that he was going to be there. Of course, he wasn't doing the surgery, but they wanted him right there to see what went on.

FRANCIS: Let's talk about communication in 1919. First, did he have any rural-type calls?

MERKEL: Oh, yes. He went all the way to the County Line Bridge (Grundy County). In all that territory there was no doctor. The Wilmington doctors took care of that.

FRANCIS: So how would they communicate to let Dr. Merkel know?

MERKEL: Phones. There were a few phones. They didn't have them in the individual homes then, but they would get to somebody that had a phone. The family would call the City Hall and ask that they communicate with a doctor and get a doctor out there. They'd just say, "Get a doctor, and send him quick." Then someone from the City Hall would come and say, "There's a doctor wanted at such-and-such a place."

FRANCIS: Where did Dr. Merkel get his drugs?

MERKEL: There was a drugstore -- "Cassingham's". Old Dr. Cassingham was one of the doctors here when we first came. He wasn't actually practicing much. He had a few patients that would go to him. Dr. Curtis and Dr. Cassingham were way up in their eighties, and they were retired but they saw a few patients. But Cassingham's had a drugstore, and the old doctor had stock in that, and then his son Fred carried on with it. And that was where there was a drugstore for many years on the west side of Water Street, right there by the old Whitmores.

FRANCIS: Is there anything else you could tell us about?

MERKEL: I'd like to say that I went with my husband a very great deal. I am a Registered Nurse, and I went on all baby cases with him. And I took my own bag of sterile linens. Nobody went to the hospital at that time for a delivery. So I was able to help him a very great deal. The other doctor in town didn't have this help. That was a point to Dr. Merkel's credit -- his wife would come with him when he was delivering babies. /Laughter/

FRANCIS: So you've been in the business since like 1919?

MERKEL: Yes, I have. I did lots of first aid in the office when Doctor wasn't here because he was the mill (paper mill) physician. And when he'd be going to the hospital in the morning, you know, that would take two or three hours right out of his morning. And when they'd have accidents or anything like that down there, I took care of all the first aid. I got pretty good experience.

FRANCIS: What are some of the changes? I know that you just retired from nursing a few years ago. What are some of the biggest changes that you can see from the time you started until a few years ago -- say 1970?

MERKEL: Well, nursing is more specialized today like in every other branch of work. So many nurses are institutional nurses. They work in the hospitals. Some of them work in industrial plants and there are very few special trained nurses going out and into the homes. If people need that kind of care, they go to the hospital today. They don't have graduate nurses in their homes. To have nurses around the clock -- it's better to go to the hospital now because the facilities are better, and it's less expensive.

FRANCIS: You said you were the mill nurse and "doctor." Was there any particular accident that sticks out in your mind?

MERKEL: There was a terrible explosion in the summer of 1936. Carl Rose and Charles Mitchell were killed, and many were hurt. In September 1937, Mr. Ralph Jilly, a safety engineer for the mill, was killed while inspecting a machine. There were other accidents, too. In fact, it was rumored that the mill had difficulty buying insurance.

FRANCIS: What was the method of sterilization?

MERKEL: Well, they had small sterilizers and everything was boiled. But in the home here, why, I just put on a big kettle in the kitchen and boiled things right up in it. First I boiled the kettle, and then I emptied that and put in more hot water and then boiled instruments. I had a kettle that was used just for that. You can sterilize in anything if it's clean and sterile to start with. For the linens, I used a copper boiler and filled it about half-full of water and then made a hammock and put my linens in the hammock and, of course, put a cover on and steamed and steamed and steamed -- that hot steam sterilized the linens that I used for obstetrics. You see, using steam, there is no chance of getting any harsh sediment from the water.

FRANCIS: Did the doctor ever have any time to do anything in the community besides his practice?

MERKEL: Well, not very much because, of course, his hours were irregular. But he did work with the school. I know that whenever they had a clinic at the beginning of the year -- this goes back quite a good many years -- they would bring the children to the school for pre-school physicals, and Dr. Merkel would always try to go to those. The doctors would examine these children; and if they needed something, like if they had enlarged tonsils and had lots of sore throats, he'd recommend that they get those tonsils out before they started in school. They had these clinics that he worked at, and the other doctors did, too. They all tried to come and help.

FRANCIS: That's something they don't have now. With such long hours how did you plan vacation time?

MERKEL: That was a very hard thing to do, but he tried to go in August; and he'd start early in the spring to tell the people -- especially people who were constantly under his care, like heart cases. And he always turned them over to the other doctor. And when the other doctor was gone on vacation, he turned his cases over to Dr. Merkel. So they were looked after.

FRANCIS: The heart cases . . . Now they've got the electric shock treatment. What did they do back then?

MERKEL: All they did was watch them and give them digitalis as a rule, a heart medication, and to watch them and to regulate their activity, you know. Not to let them work hard or anything like that. They still wanted them to exercise, though, a certain amount. They didn't want them to just sit around all the time, but they watched over them, took their pressures regularly and kept them on medication. And they lived many, many years that way being watched and treated.

FRANCIS: What was the most feared or dreaded disease?

MERKEL: Of course, we very much dreaded any contagious disease; but smallpox and diptheria were the two that we watched very, very closely and isolated immediately if we got a case. You didn't want it to spread and get a really bad situation in the community.

FRANCIS: Would the house go under quarantine or what would happen?

MERKEL: Yes, wherever they lived would be put under quarantine -- the Health Department would nail a red sign on the house. Then they'd stay in that house and then it would be fumigated after the patient recovered.

FRANCIS: How was it fumigated?

MERKEL: Well, they had candles, and they lighted those candles. They were special chloroform candles for fumigation. Sometimes they'd put three candles in a downstairs and maybe a couple upstairs and burn them. It worked pretty well. It got the house in pretty good condition.

FRANCIS: How did the doctors that were giving these patients care, take precautions?

MERKEL: Mostly by putting on a gown when they went in and leaving that gown right there -- taking it off. They had gowns that they had for that purpose and they'd also put on rubber gloves. They watched the whole thing very carefully, but mostly keeping hands clean, washing them the minute they left the patient -- washing very, very thoroughly. They took every precaution they could.

FRANCIS: That's very interesting. As a nurse, are there any special things that you were called on to do in the office?

MERKEL: Of course, as I say, I gave first aid all the time -- whenever I was needed -- and then I refilled medications, you know. I knew his drugs and he had his card index that told the dosages. If they needed refills of medicine, I could refill the bottles so they didn't have to make another return trip. Sometimes people came long distances and it was a great help to them if they could get their medicine, you know. And the doctor taught me particularly about those people that were apt to come in for medicine. He'd show me just exactly what they were getting and all about it.

FRANCIS: Did the doctor ever have a partner?

MERKEL: No, never did.

FRANCIS: When did Dr. Merkel die?

MERKEL: He died in 1938.

FRANCIS: Then who took his place?

MERKEL: Well, really someone came, but no one actually filled his place. Dr. Willson was practicing here at the time of Dr. Merkel's death. Dr. Carlin had sold his Wilmington practice (to Dr. Willson), but then re-opened an office with Dr. Gordon Richards several years later. I interviewed many doctors who were interested in buying Dr. Merkel's practice, and finally chose Dr. Lawrence Erlandson. Dr. Erlandson came from Chicago with his lovely wife and young daughter, Beverly. He took over the office, and I remodeled my home so they could have an apartment upstairs. Some years later the Erlandsons built a home and separate office building on the corner next to me.

FRANCIS: Now, you're a founder of the Wilmington PTA?

MERKEL: Yes, I guess I was.

FRANCIS: When was it started?

MERKEL: Why, I think it was 1932. Henry, Jr. was born in '29 and he was getting along towards the age that I was thinking of his starting in school. There were several things about the schools that I was very upset about. I felt that we needed a PTA to help the situation.

FRANCIS: Would you tell us just a couple of the things that had you upset?

MERKEL: You think that I should?

FRANCIS: You don't have to name any names. We can take it out of the tape if you don't want it in there.

MERKEL: Well, our superintendent in the school and the janitor were sending for liquor at times, and we could see the janitor go down and get it. He would go in the saloon and then go back. That was a very grave worry. We felt like drinking in the school was a very serious situation. Now that's one of the things that started our combined efforts to get a PTA so that things could be regulated a little better.

FRANCIS: So what did you accomplish?

MERKEL: We got rid of the superintendent that we had. Not immediately -- it took some time. But we informed people through PTA of what was going on and then immediately they wanted a change. And they worked on the Board and they got it.

FRANCIS: Were there any other activities of the PTA?

MERKEL: We put on these health clinics, you know, where the children were examined and defects corrected before they started school. That was one of the very good things that the PTA did. They started children to school in better physical condition than they had ever been because they had these clinics. Sometimes a child had a bad hernia and the parents had done nothing about it, and the child was ready to start school. So we did have a lot of things corrected through our PTA activities. We paid for corrective surgery or treatment if the family needed help.

FRANCIS: You were also the first female member of the Wilmington School Board. When were you elected?

MERKEL: I can't remember the year. I served ten years . . . I think along in the early thirties I went on.

FRANCIS: Do you have any particular recollections from that term?

MERKEL: From serving? Well, yes, I do. It was a very interesting experience and I served with a very fine group of men. Dr. Erlandson was on the Board, and . . . I'm trying to think of some of the other members. Most of them have moved away that were on the Board. But they were very much interested in building up the reputation of the scholastic abilities in our school and also interested in the standards -- setting a high standard. And it was a very, very fine experience because it was a very good Board that I served with. They never had a woman on the Board and they were very thoughtful of me, although I came home reeking with cigarette or cigar smoke; they nearly all smoked. /Laughter/

FRANCIS: Were you ever an officer during your ten years?

MERKEL: Yes, I was. I was Secretary of the Board.

FRANCIS: Who was the superintendent when you were on the Board?

MERKEL: Mr. Stevens, part of the time; but I served before his time, I think. I can't think of who was superintendent when I first went on.

FRANCIS: Were you ever directly involved with hiring the teachers?

MERKEL: Why, yes, we did hire the teachers.

FRANCIS: It wasn't on the superintendent's recommendation?

MERKEL: Yes, it was; but I mean every teacher that was hired we heard

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their recommendations and were very much guided by the superintendent because he found out all he could about the applicant and he either did recommend them or he said he didn't want to say that they shouldn't be hired, but that he couldn't recommend them.

FRANCIS: Were teachers hard to find back then?

MERKEL: Good ones were. /Laughter/ Well, I'll tell you what the big difficulty was and I found it in Joliet before I came down here and that was keeping teachers past the age when they should have been retired. There was no retirement age. We had Miss Woodruff at Joliet High School who was teaching when she was 84 -- 84 years old! That was Dr. George Woodruff's aunt.

FRANCIS: So was there tenure then that was keeping them?

MERKEL: No tenure.

FRANCIS: They hired on a year-to-year basis?

MERKEL: Yes.

FRANCIS: What was the starting salary?

MERKEL: Under $100 per month. When they got up to $100, they really felt like they were doing something. /Laughter/

FRANCIS: Did teachers have to have a certificate to teach?

MERKEL: Yes, they did. They had to have a certificate, and they had to have special training. They still went to the colleges and took a teacher's course. Of course, there were some teachers that came in and filled spots that had just had a college education and had no special teacher training,

but they would substitute or help in case of emergency because there weren't as many teachers available.

FRANCIS: Do you have any recollections of the school? Maybe some sports activities or plays or something like this.

MERKEL: Well, I think what I remember more than anything else -- they usually had a musical. They'd put on a musical program every year and use all the classes, you know, in the high school, and like seventh and eighth grade perhaps would have a chorus sing or something like that. Everybody in school looked forward to that all year. I don't know that the faculty did because they really worked awfully hard on it, especially the music teacher. The room teachers would help if their kids were singing. They'd all take part, you know. Everybody went. They'd have it three nights in order for the population to see it, and it was very, very popular. They gave some very, very fine concerts.

FRANCIS: Where would that be held?

MERKEL: It would be held in the gymnasium at the school -- set up chairs.

FRANCIS: When was the gymnasium built? Was it before you served on the Board?

MERKEL: Yes, I can remember a gymnasium as long as I can think back. It's been there a long time because I remember in PTA, you know, it was in the gymnasium where we would have all these clinics.

FRANCIS: Can you see a big attitude change in teachers from then and now?

MERKEL: Well, I think there are dedicated teachers today, but I think as you go back quite a few years that teachers were very dedicated. They were extremely dedicated. They thought that they prepared themselves for teaching and that was their field and they really were dedicated. They'd go a long way to do everything they could. When I say that, I think they spent a great deal more time possibly than they spend today when they had children that were having difficulty in school. They'd give them extra time. They'd stay after school themselves to teach them something that they weren't getting at all. The teacher realized that that just hadn't penetrated at all. She'd keep them until she could put it across to them. Today they think that hours are hours, at four o'clock they're through. Well, it's like everything else. That's the way other things are, too. Even doctors don't want to put in as long hours. They used to go all night and all day and think nothing of it. That was just their lot because they selected that as a profession.

FRANCIS: You were obviously very active in the school and the community. Is there anything else you did in the community?

MERKEL: Well, school and church.

FRANCIS: What have you done in the church?

MERKEL: Well, I served as president of the women's society three different times -- three different series like maybe three years at a time.

FRANCIS: Now where was the church located?

MERKEL: Right downtown here where the library is.

FRANCIS: And what denomination was that?

MERKEL: Methodist.

FRANCIS: What were some of the activities that you did?

MERKEL: In the church?

FRANCIS: Right.

MERKEL: Well, as I say, I worked in the women's society, but I also worked with youth. I worked in their MYF. I was one of their leaders for a long time. I worked with young people a lot. They didn't have the amount of social life outside the church that they have now, you know. They'd have a social night where they played games and had refreshments. Maybe they'd have that once a month. So, of course, the church tried to do their part.

FRANCIS: What were some of the activities of the women's society?

MERKEL: We had money-making affairs all the time. We had rummage sales and we had bake sales and chicken suppers. There was something all the time that was earning money. We many times had to give money towards the minister's salary because there wasn't enough coming in to pay the salary, and he didn't make very much either.

FRANCIS: Did you have any minister that you kind of had a soft spot for in your heart?

MERKEL: Oh, yes. Many of them. What was the name of the one that married Barbara and Henry?

FRANCIS: Was it Reverend Dunbar?

MERKEL: No, it was rather recently. Not too far back. Isn't that funny -- I can't think of his name. /She meant Reverend Kenneth Crandall/ But, yes, I have had some that I felt close to and enjoyed very, very much. In fact, I've liked most of them. Steve, I think I told you everything I know. /Laughter/

FRANCIS: No, I don't think so. You said you and Dr. Merkel came in 1919, and you had been coming here before then with another doctor? Is that right?

MERKEL: I had been. . . Dr. Houston, who was our doctor in Joliet, would come in consultation with Dr. Carlin or whoever the other doctor was down here. Sometimes there was only one doctor and sometimes there were two. And they'd get into a bad fix or they'd have a surgical case they weren't just sure of -- whether to send in or not, so they'd have Dr. Houston down to check. I used to ride down with him sometimes.

FRANCIS: So you've had a long time to look at Wilmington. What are some of the big changes?

MERKEL: The day I moved to Wilmington I heard ding-ding-ding-ding-ding-ding. So I ran out front and I saw everybody else running out in front. The noise was from a bell that they had on a string out there at the City Hall, and that was a call that there was a fire. They had horses then, you know, and they had to hitch up in a hurry. That was the very first day that I was down here that I wondered what in the world that was -- as I hadn't seen this in Joliet.

FRANCIS: Who responded to the fire call?

MERKEL: The town was very small then, and the volunteers were a lot of men

who left their jobs when the bell rang. They'd just come running and get the horses hitched up and away they'd go. There'd just be one vehicle, and they'd go to the fire.

FRANCIS: Where was the fire barn located?

MERKEL: It was, I think, on the side street. There was a barn where -- there's a building there now, but it faced that side street right there. When we first came, I think it was there.

FRANCIS: Where Clennon put that building up? /Van Buren Street/

MERKEL: Yes. Right there. It was a livery stable. I've always been close. /The fire barn is now a half block from her house on Main Street/

FRANCIS: Who was the first mayor in town that you can remember?

MERKEL: Maybe Oswald. Oh, Thompson! Thompson was before Oswald.

FRANCIS: What can you remember about him?

MERKEL: Well, he was a bachelor, and he had plenty of money, and he was dedicated to Wilmington. He had his own ideas. He gave full time to the job. He lived at VanderVeers' and had his meals there -- right across from where your mother and grandparents used to live /where Ed's Dairy Bar is/. I'm not even sure that he took any salary because he was just entirely dedicated.

FRANCIS: What was the effect on Wilmington of prohibition?

MERKEL: Well, they had to put up with it; that's about the size of it. They didn't have any choice in the matter. It was voted, and they had to put up with it. There were many people who made the taverns very regularly.

And I expect they're the ones that felt it. /Laughter/

FRANCIS: How long has Wilmington had a Memorial Parade?

MERKEL: As far back as I can remember they had a Memorial Day Parade. I used to march in it for years. I had a Red Cross uniform, and I'd put on my Red Cross uniform and carry a flag.

FRANCIS: So how long have you been with the Red Cross?

MERKEL: I've been with the Red Cross 55 years. I just celebrated 55 years' work in the Red Cross. I received a gold pin.

FRANCIS: You must have some good memories from that.

MERKEL: Oh, I have, very good.

FRANCIS: Can you relate some?

MERKEL: For many, many years down here I did lots of calling. There were lots of poor people, and as chairman of the Red Cross I would go and call on them to evaluate their needs and send in a big order of groceries. They just didn't have enough in the house to eat and the Red Cross paid for the groceries. That was at a time when there really was a lot of poverty here. Of course, people don't understand that today because the majority of people have a paycheck. But there were people that had no visible signs of support.

FRANCIS: There was no ADC or anything like that?

MERKEL: There was welfare. That money was handled by the township supervisor, but they were pretty strict because there were a good many poor people and the supervisors couldn't do very much -- give them an order of

groceries now and then. But there was some poverty here and it wasn't "across the river" poverty; it was just poor people whose husbands would be on and off work. The mill would be running, and then maybe it would be down. Anyhow their means of support would be interfered with. No wonder I'm sold on Red Cross because they've done a lot of things for lots of people. Your mother and I worked together in an awful lot of things. I don't mean your mother; I mean your grandmother.

FRANCIS: What were some of the things that you did with her? This is Grandma Bittermann?

MERKEL: Yes, we both worked in Red Cross. She was very active. In fact, we co-chairmaned it some of the time so that when I was gone, she'd look after things. She was very active in Red Cross and thought a lot of it.

Once there was a fire over in Brodie's woods and I got sent for, so I went over there and there was a child in the house and it was burning. I said, "Where's the child?" and the mother said, "In there!" Of course, I went in, but I went around to another door and went in, and I did get the child out. There was a man standing there and he said, "You've got guts." "Well," I said, "there's a lot of people here that haven't got any, as I see it." I didn't get burned and I got the child.

FRANCIS: Now would the Red Cross have helped them?

MERKEL: Yes. I went through Red Cross, of course. I gave them clothes and I did a lot of things for them. Red Cross wasn't all groceries and clothing. Often we paid for coal to give a family needed heat. Sometimes we paid for transportation . . . bought bus tickets . . . if people were stranded while travelling through Wilmington. Then, of course, we have made many mercy calls. . . especially during war years . . . putting families

in touch with their servicemen. During the war, we did our share of rolling dressings, sewing, knitting, and trained volunteers for Nurses' Aides, Motor Corps, and all those things.

FRANCIS: Thank you, Mrs. Merkel, for helping to record Wilmington's heritage.

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